

Saying it for the CIA — in nine languages

Silent Missions, by Vernon A. Walters. New York: Doubleday & Co. 654 pp. \$12.95.

By Burke Wilkinson

It is a sad fact that things honorable make news less often than things corrupt. The life story of Lt. Gen. Vernon Walters may well turn out to be the exception to that rule. Here is a man who served his country to the top of his brilliant bent, had a glorious time doing so, and tells about it with gusto and for the most part with style.

Book review

"*Silent Missions*" comes as a splendid antidote to the pallid crop of books by the perpetrators of Watergate. As you read Walters's account of his 36-year army career, you inevitably compare his grace of service and his high professional skills to the disgrace and abuse of power which were the hallmarks of Watergate.

Walters was a most unusual three-star general. He rose from private. His only command was that of languages, including fluent French,

German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, plus workable Dutch and Japanese. Add a pleasant personality to these formidable linguistic talents, and you have a man who became both interpreter and confidant to five presidents and many supreme commanders.

Inevitably, as he rose in rank, he tended into intelligence work and "silent missions." So tours of duty as military attaché in Rio and Rome and Paris ensued, and a final four years (1972-76) as Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. Just before his Paris stint, he spent considerable time in Vietnam (1967) observing combat techniques so that he could talk to his French colleagues about the terrain they had once known.

While in Paris he helped stage the secret peace talks between Henry Kissinger and the North Vietnamese. These meetings, which took place for over two years in the early 1970s, were so secret that only the President of the United States knew that they were taking place. Walters's account of the nimble ways he smuggled Kissinger in and out of Paris makes spectacular reading.

There are interesting assessments of the

great. Admiration for Ike comes right from the heart: "He represented all that was best in America and he projected his image to friend and foe alike." From Kabul to the Andes "men recognized what many of his countrymen are only now dimly perceiving, that this was one of the very great men of our time."

The full chapter on de Gaulle ("Shadow of a Giant") contains insights based on observation for over 27 years. Historians will find them valuable.

You may not agree with all the conclusions, but it would be hard to question the credentials. Because Walters' services in his dual role were extremely useful, he saw the world's great at their most amiable. So the book lacks a certain tension, and sometimes the comments are a bit bland. But the intimacy of the glimpses more than atones.

Thanks to his capacity for observing, remembering — and admiring — General Walters has given us a book that can make Americans a little prouder.

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